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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 005514

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2015

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SUBJECT: VISIT OF NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY WELCH TO CAIRO
JULY 16, 2005: RADIO SAWA DISCUSSION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER
AHMED ABOUL GHEIT

Classified by: Charge Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) In a July 16 meeting, NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch asked Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit to agree to the installation of a FM transmitter in Egypt to facilitate Radio Sawa broadcasts. Until this is done, A/S Welch underscored, \$227 million in ESF money will not be released. He further asked that GOE officials agree to meet with members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors here in Egypt to approve the transmitter proposal as soon as possible. By way of background, A/S Welch reminded Aboul Gheit that this issue has been pending since 2001 and that he had discussed the matter personally with successive Ministers of Information during his tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Egypt. Although AM transmitters may cause disruption to Egyptian broadcasting, an FM transmitter would not, A/S Welch explained.

2. (C) Aboul Gheit expressed displeasure that Egypt's ESF money was being withheld because of the Radio Sawa issue. Trying to link GOE assistance to a project such as this "will not work," said Aboul Gheit, stressing "you should know this." Assistant Minister for the Americas, Ambassador Shadia Farrag, said that the only option is to raise the matter with the Minister for Investment and consider placing an AM transmitter outside of Media City. GOE law does not, she said, permit licensing private foreign FM broadcasting companies. After accusing the USG of creating a negative atmosphere, Aboul Gheit suggested A/S Welch work to solve what he characterized as a "technical problem."

3. (U) Assistant Secretary Welch cleared this message.

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CORBIN